

PRESS RELEASE

Baker-Polito Administration Announces \$10.2 Million Federal Award To Westfield Gas + Electric For Broadband Access in Western Massachusetts

Federal funding through FCC's Connecting America Fund will benefit 20 communities

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Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development

Office of Governor Charlie Baker and Lt. Governor Karyn Polito

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WESTFIELD — Today, the Baker-Polito Administration announced that Westfield Gas & Electric (WG+E), a public utility supplying electric, natural gas, and high-speed internet service, has received a more than \$10.2 million funding authorization from the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to expand fiber-based broadband in 20 communities covering over 12,400 households in rural western Massachusetts. This funding represents the results of last year's Connect America Fund Phase II auction thanks to efforts undertaken by the Baker-Polito Administration, Westfield Gas + Electric, the Massachusetts Broadband Institute, the Commonwealth's congressional delegation, and state and local leaders.

WG+E will receive the funding over the next decade and then distribute the funds to the participating towns. While the FCC requires a 25/3 Mbps download/upload speed, the participating towns are building networks

that provide symmetrical 1 Gbps download/upload speeds. The CAF II auction is part of a broader effort by the FCC to close the digital divide in rural America.

“Our administration has been making significant progress towards the goal of delivering broadband access to the unserved and underserved residents in rural Massachusetts,” **said Governor Charlie Baker**. “We will continue to work with our municipalities and other partners to make these investments in reliable high-speed internet access and the quality of life for all residents.”

“I have had the privilege of visiting all 351 communities across the Commonwealth, including rural towns in Western Massachusetts awaiting access to important broadband internet service,” **said Lt. Governor Karyn Polito**. “It has been rewarding to watch as communities ‘flip the switch’ on this critical connectivity and our administration is committed to seeing these projects through to completion.”

“The top priority of this administration has always been to ensure the entire Commonwealth benefits from the strength of the Massachusetts economy, and high-speed broadband is a critical piece to regionally equitable opportunity,” **said Housing and Economic Development Secretary Mike Kennealy**. “We will continue our efforts to deliver access to the modern necessity of a reliable internet connection to those who live and work in all areas of the state.”

“In today’s America, broadband equals opportunity, innovation, and job creation,” **said Senator Edward J. Markey**. “That’s why I’m proud to have helped Westfield Gas and Electric secure this vital funding for new broadband infrastructure in some of the most underserved parts of Massachusetts. All residents of the Commonwealth deserve access to the employment, education, and entertainment that come from online connectivity in the 21st century. I will keep fighting until every family in the nation is connected.”

“The Connect America Fund from the Federal Communications Commission has been a great help to communities like those here in western Massachusetts who are still at odds as to how to get broadband for their residents,” **said Congressman Richard E. Neal**. “Thanks to that funding and the on-the-ground work of Westfield Gas and Electric, residents will be able to reap the benefits.”

“Reliable high-speed internet is an essential service that everyone should have access to,” **said Congressman Jim McGovern**. “While Massachusetts has already come a long way, even one family without broadband access is too many. These new federal funds will help ensure every household has the tools they need for success in the 21st century, and I am proud of the strong work of our local leaders to leverage federal dollars and expand high-speed internet across the Commonwealth.”

“Our more than 80 employees have been proud to play a role in moving residents in 20 communities in rural Massachusetts closer to accessing the benefits of high-speed internet. We look forward to putting these critical federal funds to work in tandem with the investments made by the municipalities and the Commonwealth,” **said Anthony Contrino, General Manager, Westfield Gas + Electric/Whip City Fiber**.

Westfield Gas + Electric is assisting 20 Western Massachusetts communities construct municipal-owned fiber-optic broadband networks that will help address the lack of high-speed internet connectivity. These WG+E-managed construction projects have received more than \$19 million in support from the Commonwealth's [Last Mile Infrastructure Grant](#)

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The Commonwealth, through the Massachusetts Broadband Institute at MassTech, will provide over \$1 million in collateral funding to support the federal award to WG+E. The MBI is working collaboratively with Berkshire Bank to establish the account and while no state funds are likely to be used from the collateral account, they provide a critical backstop that will allow the award to move forward.

“It takes an extraordinary amount of teamwork to tackle the challenges of bringing broadband to unserved areas of the Commonwealth,” **said Carolyn Kirk, Executive Director of the MassTech Collaborative, the parent organization of the MBI.** “Local officials and volunteers, state and federal leadership, along with partnering organizations like MassTech and WG&E, have worked together to secure these funds which will directly benefit each eligible community, freeing up precious local resources for other important municipal services.”

Since 2016, the Commonwealth's Last Mile program has invested nearly \$35 million in direct awards to support broadband connections, including public/private projects and municipal-owned fiber-to-the-home networks. Of the 53 communities that were either completely or partially unserved at the beginning of 2016, only one remains, as 52 towns are now on a path to broadband connectivity. To date, 16 of these 53 towns have completed networks, delivering internet speeds at or above the FCC's definition of broadband (25 megabits per second for downloads/3 megabits per second for uploads) to over 6,800 premises.

More information about the Connect America Fund is available at <https://www.fcc.gov/general/connect-america-fund-caf>

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About Westfield Gas and Electric

Westfield Gas + Electric is a municipal utility in Westfield, Massachusetts. Doing business as Whip City Fiber, they offer gigabit internet service delivered across a fiber optic network directly to homes and businesses in the City of Westfield. They have assisted a number of towns in Western Massachusetts in establishing a municipal light plant and locally owned internet service. Whip City Fiber will serve as ISP/NO to many of these organizations.

About the MBI

A division of the Massachusetts Technology Collaborative, the Massachusetts Broadband Institute (MBI) is working to extend high-speed Internet access to homes, businesses, schools, libraries, medical facilities, government offices, and other public places across the Commonwealth. Learn more

at <https://broadband.masstech.org>

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